

STATEMENT OF SILVESTRE REYES

TUESDAY, MAY 13, 1997

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to speak out in opposition to H.R. 629, a bill to ratify the Texas-Maine-Vermont Low-Level Radioactive Waste Compact. As you know, the bill will allow the Texas, Vermont, and Maine to dispose of their low-level nuclear waste in Texas. While this legislation does not directly determine the site of disposal, the State of Texas is limited by state law to a 200 square mile area in West Texas and has already selected the Sierra Blanca site, the county seat of Hudspeth County.

While Sierra Blanca itself is not in my congressional district, it is of major concern to the people of El Paso, which live just 90 miles west of the proposed site.

There are many good reasons why this bill should not be passed, many of which my colleague, Representative Bonilla has articulated. I would like to talk about one reason in particular that **cannot** be ignored: respecting our bi-national agreements.

In 1983, the United States and Mexico signed the La Paz agreement, which directs both governments to adopt appropriate measures to prevent, reduce, and eliminate sources of pollution in their respective territory which affect the border area of the other. The border region is defined as properties within 100 kilometers — or 60 miles — on either side of the Rio Grande. Sierra Blanca is 20 miles from the Rio Grande River which, as you know, is the international boundary between the U.S. and Mexico.

The State of Texas asserts that they must merely inform the government of Mexico of their actions. I disagree. There is widespread objection to this site at all levels of the Mexican Government. The Mexican State of Chihuahua, which adjoins the proposed site, opposes the site of the site in Sierra Blanca. The Governor of the Mexican State of Chihuahua has sent a letter of objection to the Governor of Texas. The Embassy of Mexico has expressed its concerns about the proposed site. The Chairman of the Mexican Senate's Committee on the Environment has written his American counterpart to object. The City Council of the Ciudad **Juarez**, El Paso's sister city, has issued a position statement in opposition to the site.

Even if we choose to ignore the concerns of our Mexican neighbors — which I don't believe we should — let's at least listen to the Texas legislature. Earlier this year the House Appropriations Committee voted to stop funding for this proposed site. Congress should not endorse a project that has been rejected at the state level.

Finally, during the 104th Congress, a majority agreed that this proposal was flawed. Nothing has changed that should change the mind of the **105th** Congress.

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Hall, members of the subcommittee, I urge you in the strongest possible terms to reject H.R. 629. Thank you.